

Gender and Higher Education: Developing a Sociology of Absences

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Where is Gender in Dominant HE Discourses?



- ✓ quality assurance
- ✓ globalisation
- ✓ knowledge economy
- ✓ innovation
- ✓ teaching and learning
- ✓ widening participation
- ✓ internationalisation
- ✓ civic engagement
- ✓ digitisation
- ✓ knowledge transfer/exchange

The Morphology of the University of the Future?



- Are current discourses limiting creative thinking about the future of HE?
- Are universities reduced to delivery agencies for government-decreed outcomes (Young, 2004)?
- Are policy priorities commensurate with aspirations/ desires/identities of students/ staff?
- Are 'urgent' policy discourses silencing equity concerns in higher education?

HE in International Policy Architecture



Priorities (UNESCO, World Bank, OECD)

✓ innovation, knowledge transfer /exchange (techno-science?) and wealth creation/ way out of recession.

X equalities (except for access).

Emphasis on:

✓ knowledge liquification and optimisation.

X not power/knowledge or knowledge as pleasure.

Why Re-Imagine Higher Education?



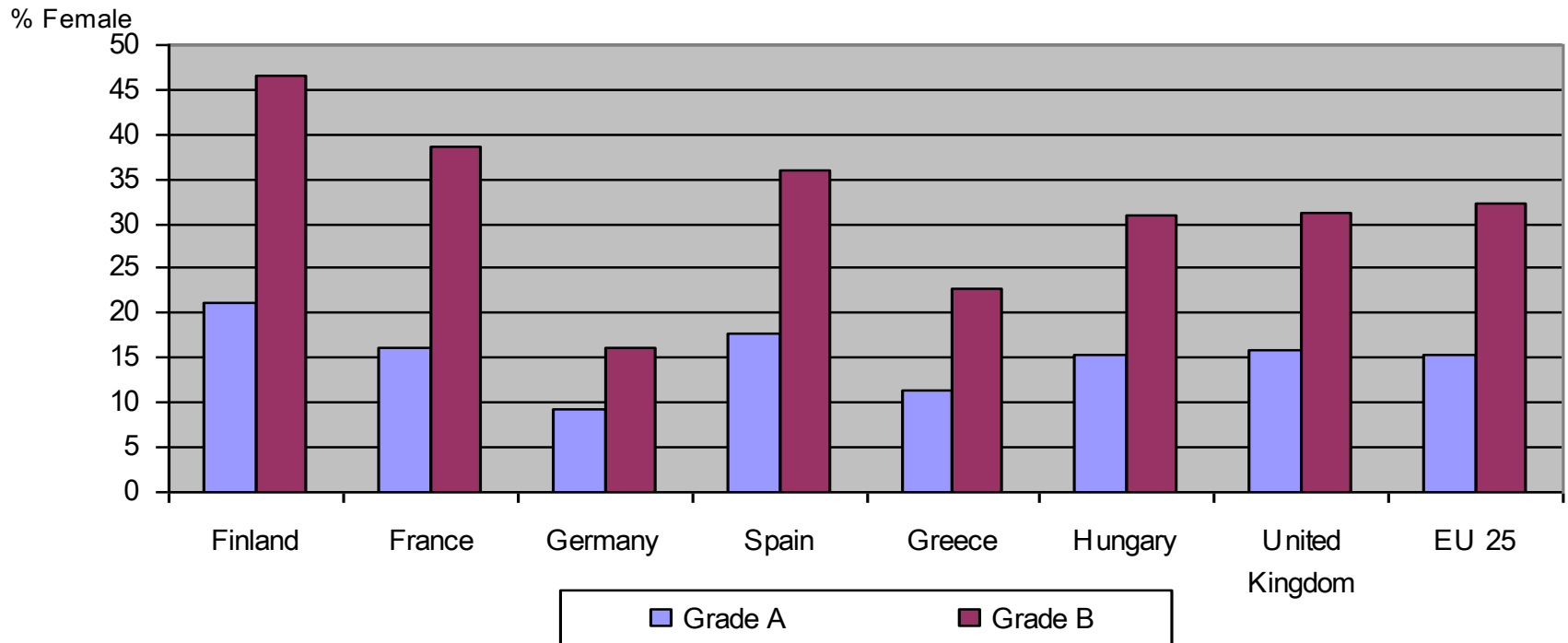
Major site of:

- ✓ cultural practice
- ✓ identity formation
- ✓ knowledge formation and dissemination
- ✓ symbolic control.

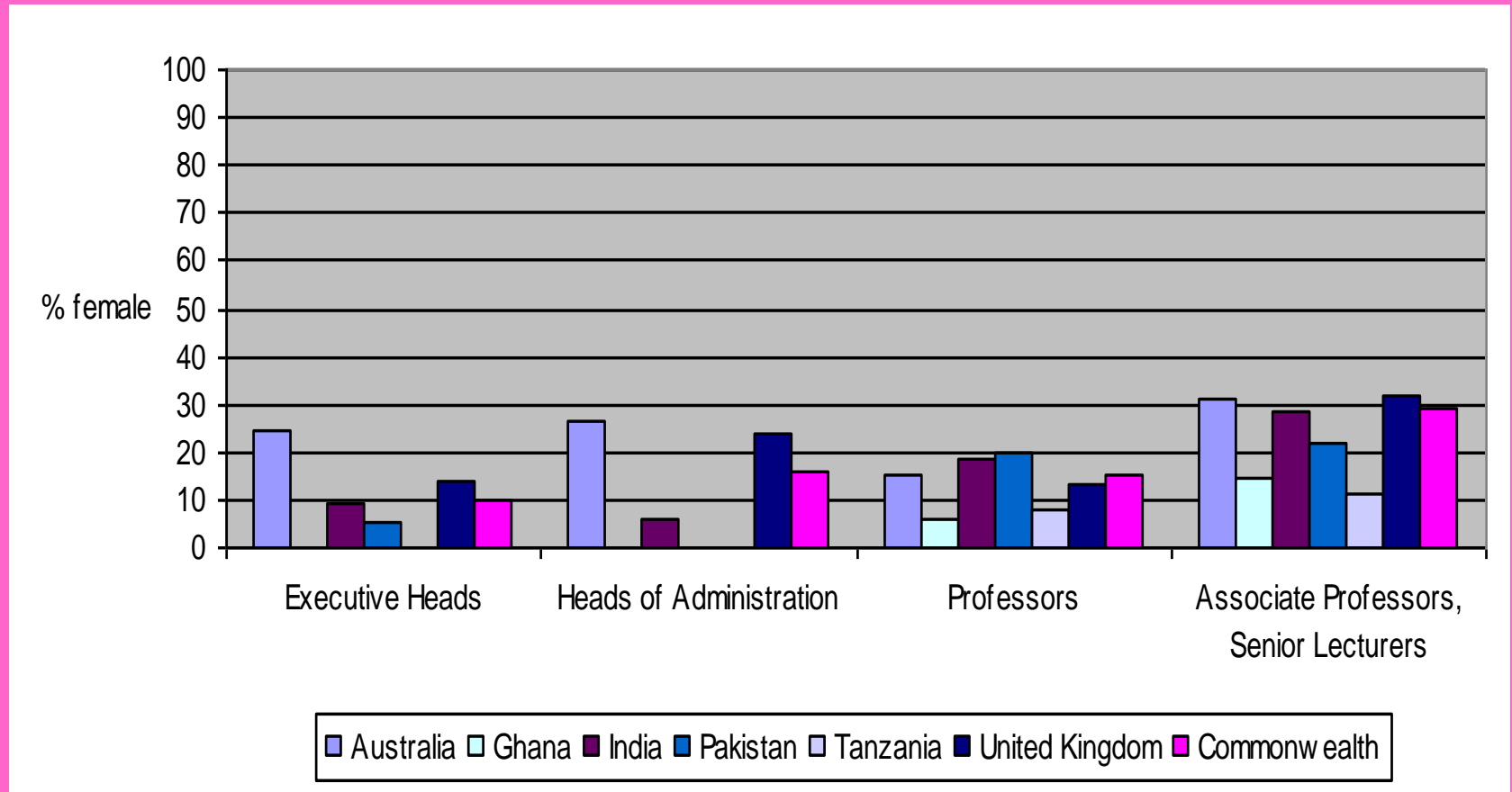
Caught between:

- ✓ archaism
- ✓ hyper-modernisation

Proportion Of Female Academic Staff by Grade in The European Union (EU, 2006).



Women's Participation In Management and Academic Leadership in Selected Commonwealth Countries, 2006 (Singh, 2008)



Missing Women (Sen, 2003)



- **Women's participation as undergraduate students globally has increased rapidly.**
- **Women's participation in senior academic and executive positions globally is increasing very slowly.**
- **Women disappear when power, resources and influence increase.**

Gender in Higher Education Policy Discourse



- **Gender = access, quantitative change, disadvantage and remediation.**
- **HE products and processes = gender neutral.**
- **Power and privilege = under-theorisation.**
- **Redistributive measures = social engineering.**
- **Equity = threat to excellence.**
- **Women's increased access = feminisation (Leathwood and Read, 2008).**
- **Women's successes = danger for men (HEPI, 2009).**

Gender as a Verb



- Gender is not a given, but is in continual production.
- We 'do' gender in:
 - ✓ processes of knowledge production and distribution;
 - ✓ opportunity structures;
 - ✓ social and pedagogical relations.

Crisis Discourse of Feminisation



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- Suggests that a woman's place is in the minority;
- Assumes that women's success has come about by damaging males;
- Reconstructs dominant group as victims;
- Sets a ceiling on women's participation;
- Positions women as (turbo charged) consumers, but not in powerful positions as knowledge producers/ gatekeepers.
- Individual, not collective rights;
- Resistance to distributive justice/ subversion of gender equality.

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Common-sense or Analytical Understanding of Gender?



- Underpinned by essentialism;
- Reduces gender to quantitative change/ confusing sex and gender;
- Reinforces gender dichotomy/ seesaw;
- Fails to challenge wider gendered power relations;
- Fails to increase women's rights in wider civil society;
- Allows women to succeed in HE, but not in labour market.



Higher education caught
between:

- ✓ Nostalgia
- ✓ Frenzy
- ✓ Inertia

Nostalgia



Grievable and Ungrievable Losses

(Butler, 2004)



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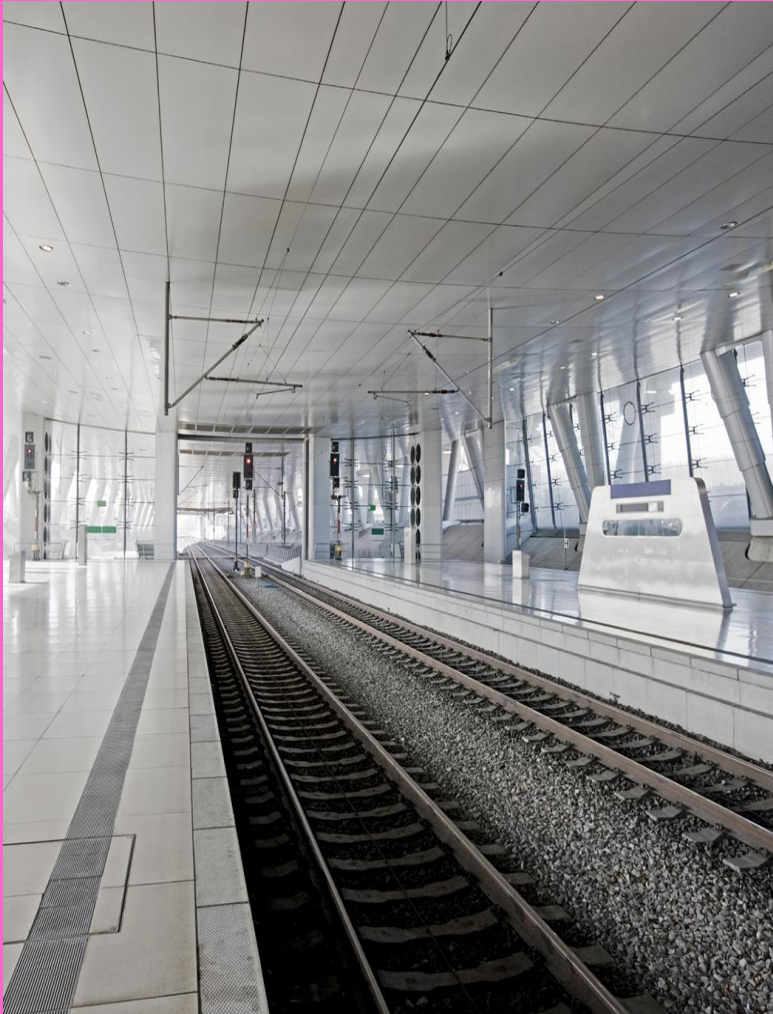


Discourses of melancholia, crisis, loss, damage, contamination, and decay in higher education.

- **the university in ruins** (Readings, 1996)
- **the 'degradation' of academia** (Nisbet, 1971)
- **the university 'in crisis'** (Sommer, 1995)
- **the death of autonomy** (Dill, 2001)
- **proletarianisation** (Dearlove, 1997)

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New Times?



- Transformation driven by neo-liberal policies rather than academic imaginary.
- Gender inequalities resistant to hypermodernisation forces.

Frenzy





- **Academic hyper mobility** (Kenway, 2004);
- **Academics in state of 'continual animation'** (Ball, 2008: 54);
- **Diffusion of bodily and textual selves into multiple locations;**
- **Cosmopolitanism, nomadism and spaces of transition;**
- **Expectations of performativity assume academics are 'carefree'** (Lynch, 2009);
- **Generative potential of the global;**
- **Parochialism = cognitive dispossession.**

New Competitions



- **Secure knowledge niches have been destabilised (Appadurai, 2006).**
- **Innovative ideas and practices coming from both outside the North and outside of the academy (Santos, 1999).**
- **Knowledge transfer/exchange as disruption of centres and margins (Biesta, 2007).**
- **Barriers dissolved between public and private (Ball, 2008).**
- **De-territorialisation of knowledge.**



Student enrolment worldwide:

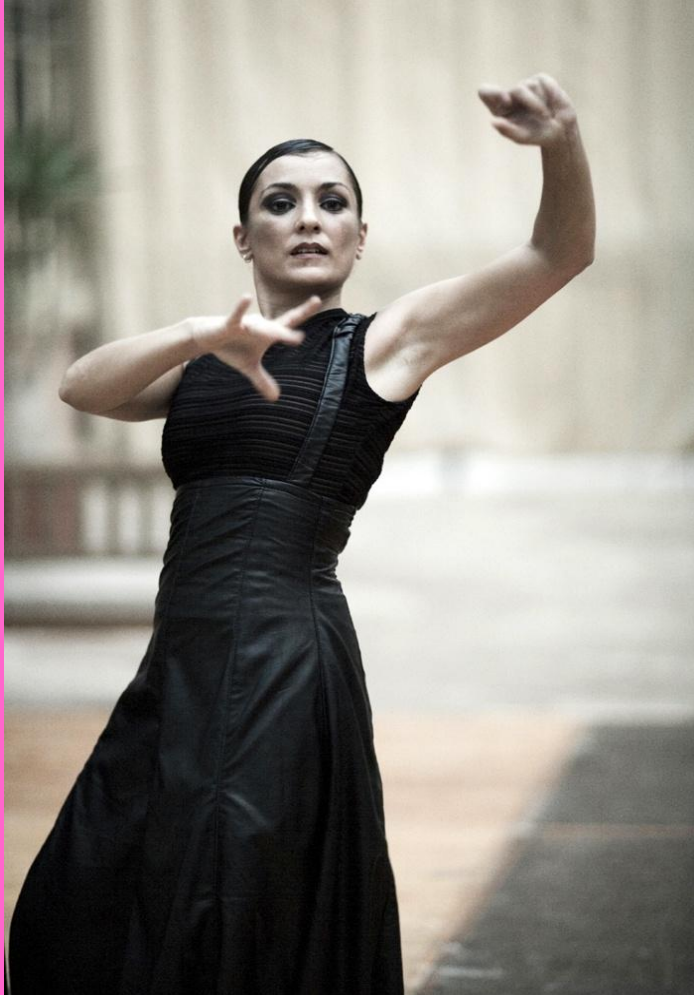
- ✓ 13 million in 1960
 - ✓ 82 million in 1995
 - ✓ 137.8 million in 2005
-
- ✓ 24% globally
 - ✓ 5% in Sub-Saharan Africa
 - ✓ 1% in Tanzania

(UNESCO, 1998; UNESCO, 2007).

Who Are These New (Turbo-Charged) Students/ Consumers?



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- **Global Gender Parity Index of 1.08** (UNESCO, 2009).
- **Unevenly distributed across regions and disciplines.**

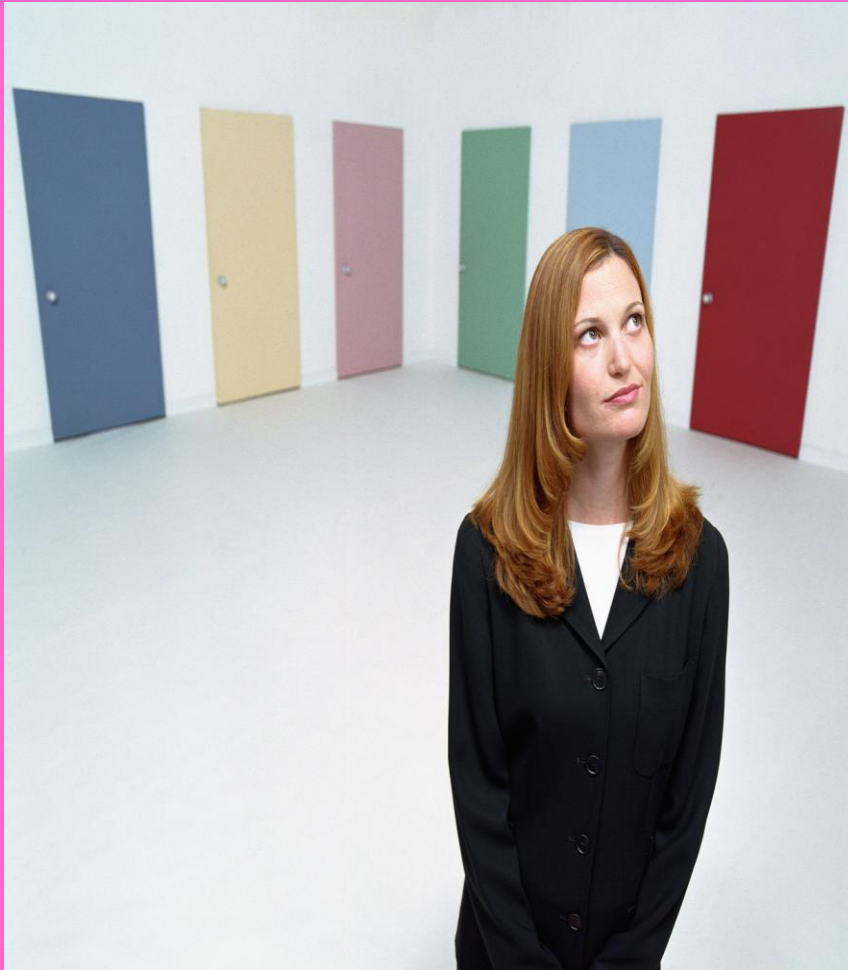
In 2007 there were more women than men in:

- ✓ **Northern America**
- ✓ **Western Europe**
- ✓ **Central and Eastern Europe**
- ✓ **Latin America**
- ✓ **Caribbean**
- ✓ **Central Asia**

There were more men than women in:

- ✓ **East Asia**
- ✓ **Pacific**
- ✓ **South and West Asia**
- ✓ **Sub-Saharan Africa**

Gendered Choice Literacy



- **Women comprise:**
- **70 per cent of university students in Education;**
- **63 per cent of students in Health and Welfare;**
- **16 per cent of students in Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction;**
- **29 per cent of students in Science (UNESCO, 2008).**
- **Women = subjects associated with low-wage sectors of the economy**
- **Higher education subject areas = different occupations/ social hierarchies, and contribute to gender inequalities in civil society.**

Inertia



Gender Mainstreaming?



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- **Gender insensitive pedagogy (Welch, 2006);**
- **Sexual harassment (Morley and Lussier, 2009; Townsley and Geist, 2000);**
- **Gendered micropolitics (Morley, 1999);**
- **Gendered promotion, professional development and tenure (Acker, 2009; Knights and Richards, 2003);**
- **Women and Leadership (Husu, 2009);**
- **Gendered knowledge production and dissemination (Hughes, 2002);**
- **Gender Pay Gap (EU, 2007);**
- **Gendered curricula and subject choices (Morley *et al*, 2006).**

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Which Women?



Are we now
educating 'doctors'
daughters rather
than doctors'
sons'?

(Williams/ Eagleton 2008)

Widening Participation in Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania



Measuring:

- Sociological variables of gender, age, socio-economic status (SES)

In Relation to:

- Educational Outcomes: access, retention and achievement.

In Relation to:

- 4 Programmes of Study in each HEI.
- 2 Public and 2 private HEIs.

(Morley, Leach and Lugg, 2008)

www.sussex.ac.uk/education/wideningparticipation

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**Equity Scorecard 1: Access to Level 200 on 4
Programmes at a Public University in Ghana
According to Age, Gender and Socio Economic Status
(SES)**

Programme	% of Students on the Programme						
	Women	Low SES	Age 30 or over	Mature and Low SES	Women and low SES	Women 30 or over	Poor Mature Women
B.Commerce	29.92	1.66	5.82	0.00	1.11	0.28	0.00
B. Management Studies	47.06	2.94	6.30	0.00	1.68	3.36	0.00
B.Education (Primary)	36.36	8.08	65.66	8.08	2.02	21.21	2.02
B.Sc. Optometry	30.77	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Equity Scorecard 2: Access to Level 200 on 4 Programmes at a Public University in Tanzania According to Age, Gender and Socio Economic Status (SES)

Programme	% of Students on the Programme						
	Women	Low SES	Age 30 or over	Mature and Low SES	Women and low SES	Women 30 or over	Poor Mature Women
B. Commerce	32.41	8.59	1.13	0.16	0.32	0.0	0.0
LLB. Law	56.18	13.48	0.0	0.0	5.06	0.0	0.0
B.Sc. Engineering	25.05	11.65	1.36	0.0	1.36	1.17	0.0
B. Science with Education	11.20	28.00	4.80	1.6	0.80	0.0	0.0

Sociology of Absences



- When gender is intersected with:
 - ✓ socio-economic status
 - ✓ age
- participation rates of:
 - ✓ poorer
 - ✓ mature women
- are extremely low in both African countries.
- Is women's poverty central to transnational capitalism?

'Now' Universities Built on Yesterday's Foundations

Hyper-modernisation of:

- **Liquified globalisation**
- **Entrepreneurial, corporate, commercialised universities**
- **Digitisation**
- **Speeded up public intellectuals on the move**
- **Turbo-charged consuming students.**

Archaism of:

- **Unequal participation**
- **Gender inequalities in employment**
- **Gendered disciplinary choices**
- **Gendered opportunity structures**
- **Feminisation fears.**

The University of the Future Needs to...

- Reclaim higher education as a gender sensitive think tank, producer of critical knowledge, social criticism and policy driver.
- Build on transnational feminisms.
- Find new conceptual grammars for theorising higher education that incorporate understanding of identities, inequalities and intersectionalities.
- Not just focus on knowledge transfer, but de-parochialise research - geographically and theoretically.
- Be aware of gendered power geometries- particularly in age of austerity/knowledge recession.
- Develop a sociology of absences.

[http://www.sussex.ac.uk/
education/cheer](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/education/cheer)



ESRC Seminar Series: Imagining the University of the Future

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